United Nations E/CN.3/2001/11

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 2000

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-second session
6-9 March 2001
Item 4 (e) of the provisional agenda*
Economic statistics: Ottawa Group on Price Indexes

Report of the Ottawa Group on Price Indexes

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Ottawa Group on Price Indexes (Convener: Canada), which is contained in the annex. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-first session.[1]

Points for discussion

2. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Discuss whether the mandate of the Ottawa Group is focused and its objectives are clear and attainable;

(b) Comment on the Ottawa Group's proposals for future work.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 4* (E/2000/24), para. 1.

* E/CN.3/2001/1.

00-79688 (E) 190101

Annex

Report of the Ottawa Group on Price Indexes

Purpose

The Ottawa Group was created to provide a forum for specialists to share their experience and discuss research on crucial problems of measuring price change. Without avoiding theoretical issues, the focus of the Ottawa Group is on applied research, particularly but not exclusively in the area of consumer price indices. Participants are specialists and practitioners who work for or are advisers to statistical agencies in different countries or international organizations.

Year organized

1994

Participants

Members of statistical offices of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, the International Monetary Fund, the International Labour Organization, the Economic Commission for Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development have attended at least one meeting, as have other experts or other countries.

Meetings (approximately annual)

Ottawa, 31 October-3 November 1994

Stockholm, 15-17 November 1995

Voorburg, the Netherlands, 16-18 April 1997

Washington, D.C., 22-24 April 1998

Reykjavik, 25-27 August 1999

Australia, 21-26 April 2001

France, 2002

Topics considered

Fundamental problems of measurement, particularly at the microlevel, have been constant themes. These include estimation (for example, the adoption of the geometric mean at the first step of calculation), sampling and the treatment of quality change in all its manifestations. Questions of bias were considered explicitly at the 1994 and 1997 meetings. The different requirements of indexes for different purposes, for example, between inflation measurement and for compensation, have been discussed at more than one meeting. Other topics covered include certain difficult areas of consumer price indexes, such as health and financial services, survey methodology and management, and the growing availability of electronic sales databases (scanner data).

In 1999, two main topics were discussed. The first topic, "Treatment of quality change in price indices for durable goods", was principally devoted to the use of different techniques and procedures dealing with quality changes in durable goods. The second topic, "Different concepts of price indices serving different purposes", was principally devoted to the question of whether consumer price indices — intended to measure inflation, escalate incomes or deflate personal consumption — should have the same philosophical base.

Products

Papers and proceedings of the meetings are published.

Planned activities

The Australia Bureau of Statistics is hosting the next meeting, to be held from 2 to 6 April 2001, and the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques of France is hosting the meeting in 2002.

The general subject for the next meeting is "Price indices for services". Within this general subject area, the following two topics have been selected for presentations and discussion at the sixth meeting: "Price indices for telecommunications" and "Price indices for financial services". It is suggested that the meeting start with a presentation and discussion on one major conceptual problem. Presentations and discussions on a limited number of detailed price index problems would follow, devoted to the use of different concrete procedures and techniques.

Expected future products (dates)

The proceedings of the meeting include the papers, a summary of the discussion and a report of recommendations, where agreement can be reached.

The meetings focus on a small number of topics in order to concentrate the preparatory work and the discussion. Proceedings of the Reykjavik meeting are available on the Ottawa Group web site at:

http://www.statcan.ca/secure/english/ottawagroup/

Point of contact

Louis Marc Ducharme

Director, Prices Division

Statistics Canada

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0T6

Telephone: 613-951-0688

Fax: 613-951-2848

Email: louismarc.ducharme@statcan.ca